

On September 11, 2001 our nation experienced multiple attacks on our physical infrastructure and our way of life. The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has been at the forefront of our nation's response to these tragedies.

In a photograph taken by Deputy Secretary Claude Allen, Secretary Tommy Thompson lends a helping hand in New York City at the Twin Towers disaster.

Our Response to the September Attacks

HHS has overall responsibility for public health in national emergencies. We provided medical personnel and funds for the World Trade Center (WTC) and Pentagon disasters as well as the plane crash site in rural Pennsylvania. Altogether, more than 1,500 HHS personnel were deployed in response to these disasters.

Response was Immediate

✱ At 9:10 a.m. on September 11, 23 minutes after the WTC was hit, HHS activated the Emergency Operations Center at the Office of Emergency Preparedness in Rockville, MD.

✱ At 9:30 a.m. that morning, Secretary Thompson directed that the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) be placed on a heightened state of readiness. The NDMS provides medical personnel rapidly to support local areas when they need assistance to meet a substantial emergency situation.

✱ Secretary Thompson also declared a Public Health Emergency that day, mobilizing the NDMS.

HHS Agencies Pull Together

While the emergency operations at the three disaster sites were obviously at the forefront of HHS efforts, there was other important recovery work being carried out across HHS by a variety of our HHS components.

✱ CDC dispatched a 50-ton "Push Package" from the National Pharmaceutical Stockpile to NYC, the first-ever deployment of one of these emergency supply packages.

✱ The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) conducted sampling for total and respirable dust, silica, asbestos, and volatile organic compounds.

✱ CMS issued monetary advances to ten New York area hospitals that experienced problems with cash flow and meeting payrolls.



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- Immediately following the attacks, ACF, SAMHSA and AOA released \$2.5 million in special grants for disaster-related temporary shelter, mental health services, and other services.

- In addition to the "Push Packages," CDC also provided 84,000 bags of intravenous fluid, 600 portable and stationary ventilators, and other supplies.

- AOA and CMS jointly established an 800 telephone number for seniors and persons with disabilities who are home-bound or have questions or needs related to their health care.

- SAMHSA reorganized its web page to help parents, teachers, seniors, and others affected by the tragedy to find local mental health and counseling resources.

- FDA's Northeast Regional Laboratory in Jamaica, Queens, NYC offered lab space to the Customs Service, which used it to analyze a variety of substances, including illicit drugs.

- CDC deployed 14 workers to assist the NYC Health Department in providing patient care and follow-up needs.

- IHS provided physicians and nurses to assist with relief efforts in New York City.

- CDC deployed 35 members of the Epidemic Intelligence Service to hospitals throughout NYC to assist health officials and physicians to monitor diseases. No anomalies were indicated.

- Special agents with HHS' Office of the Inspector General (OIG), assisted

the FBI in conducting investigative leads; agents also served as the HHS liaison to a joint terrorism task force in New York City.

Meeting the Needs On-Site

While HHS employees were on site in Pennsylvania and at the Pentagon, at least 75 percent of total responders were in New York City.

Of those employees on site at the three locations, the overwhelming majority were involved in either the Disaster Medical Assistance Teams (DMAT) or Disaster Mortuary Operational Response Teams (DMORT) operations.

DMATs operated a number of medical clinics within five blocks of the WTC site. They were also instrumental in the personnel staging process, as it was imperative that the right people got to the appropriate spot with the right equipment in order for the relief effort to be most effective.

DMORTs were instrumental in helping to process and identify victims' remains. DMORT personnel provided 24 hour support to the NYC Medical Examiner in the following capacities: data entry, morgue clean up, photo/scanning, liaison officers, and in supervisory capacities.

Other HHS personnel served important functions during that period:

- Helping to relieve nursing staff at the Presbyterian Hospital burn center;

- Providing mental health assistance to rescue workers;

- Veterinary medicine personnel tended to the search dogs assisting with the rescue operation; and

- Helping to staff the USNS Comfort, which provided meals, respite, and mental health services for responders.

